

CAO Comments
February 22, 2016

For any organization to be effective, all of the people involved must understand what they are trying to accomplish as a group, and what they are responsible for as individuals. There is no such thing as one role being more important than any other; there are only different roles that work together. The captain of a ship cannot steer if the mechanic does not have the engines working. When people understand how their roles complement each other, they can be the most effective in accomplishing what needs to be done.

Effective public sector governance, just like any private sector company, is also based on role clarity. Local governance comprises both elected officials and administrative staff, who both have important roles to play in the success of a community.

Members of Council are elected by the community to represent their views and discuss the future of the area. Council's role is to understand the pulse of the community, to approve the policies and bylaws that clearly communicate how a community will be governed, and set the vision for the future. On the other side of the equation, administrative staff are hired for their expertise in particular areas, to carry out the vision that Council has outlined. Staff bring a wealth of experience in engineering, urban planning, and finance, just to name a few. This healthy relationship is based on an ongoing dialogue between Council's understanding of the community and administration's technical expertise. Conversely, staff are expected not to interfere with Council's interaction with the public, nor should Council tell staff how to do their jobs.

All teams need leaders, which the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer (or CAO) fulfill. The Mayor's role is to lead Council discussions and act as the public face of Council for all public matters, while the CAO's role is to lead and manage administrative staff in their daily duties, while they carry out the formal wishes of Council. The CAO does not set policy, nor does she act in a political manner. As the leader of the administration, she provides unbiased opinions to Council on the workings of the municipality.

While the Mayor leads the governing of a community by building consensus on Council, the Mayor still represents only one vote on Council decisions. Her vote is an equal voice on the direction of a community. As well, it is not the Mayor's role to manage the workings of the municipality. Municipal Council has only one employee, the CAO. Council holds the CAO accountable for the performance of municipal staff and the operations of the municipality.

This healthy separation of roles is crucial for the effective leadership of a community, because when anyone understands their role, they can do it better.